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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the effect of curriculum modifications in the English 3 (11th grade) program on at-risk students. A literature review revealed that programs including curriculum modifications have been implemented by various school systems to help reduce dropout problems and/or to assist students who are at risk of failing. This study used historical data. Non-random data were collected through high school transcripts of both the control group (an English 3 class receiving no curriculum modifications) and the experimental group (an English 3 class receiving modifications). Working from class rosters, researcher examined students' records and recorded data (all identifiers were removed from the researcher's copy of the records). Items recorded included gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, attendance, age, IQ, first semester grade, second semester grade, and group (experimental or control). A multiple regression analysis determined the correlation between second semester and first semester grades, in addition to the other items recorded. Results revealed a significant difference in grades of at-risk students receiving curriculum modifications and students who did not receive curriculum modifications. Gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, attendance, age, IQ, and first semester scores did not significantly impact scores. (Contains 39 references.) (SM)

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Running Head: EFFECT OF CURRICULUM MODIFICATIONS FOR AT-RISK STUDENTS ENROLLED IN THE ENGLISH III

The Effect of Curriculum Modifications for At-Risk Students Enrolled in English III

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effect of curriculum modifications in the English III (eleventh grade) program on at-risk students. Since there seems to be a growing number of at-risk students and since high schools in Tennessee have been mandated by the state to reduce the drop-out rate to ten percent by the year 2000, it is crucial to continue addressing the problem of students at-risk and to examine if curriculum modifications play a significant role in promoting success with at-risk students.

A review of literature revealed that programs including curriculum modifications have been implemented by a variety of school systems in an attempt to reduce the drop-out problem and/or to assist students who are at risk of failing. The review of literature focused on the need for curriculum modification for at-risk students, direct results of curriculum modifications for at-risk students, and case studies that concern at-risk students.

Historical data for this study was used. Non random data (students were assigned to each class) were collected through high school transcripts of both the control group (a 1994 English III class receiving no curriculum modifications) and the experimental group (a 1994 English III class receiving curriculum modifications). Working from a roster for each class, records of students were examined one by one, and data was recorded. All identifiers were omitted from the researcher's copy of the records. Items recorded included the following: gender, ethnicity, social economic status, attendance, age, IQ, first semester grade, second semester grade, and group (experimental or control).

A multiple regression using a .05 level of significance was run to determine the correlation between the second semester scores and the first

semester scores, in addition to gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, attendance, age, IQ, and group number.

The results of this study revealed that there was a significant difference in scores of at-risk students receiving curriculum modifications and students who do not receive curriculum modifications.

Results lead to several recommendations:

1. At-risk English III students should be identified the first semester of each school year.

2. Curriculum modifications should be made for at-risk English III students.

3. Follow-up research should be completed on at-risk English III students who receive curriculum modification.

4. Future research should study at-risk English students enrolled in English I, English II, English III, and English IV at the high school level to determine if curriculum modifications significantly affect students' scores.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Historically, American education has evolved from the Pilgrims establishing schools to teach religious leaders and for individuals to learn to read the Bible to Americanizing the influx of immigrants who arrived in the country during the eighteen hundreds to preparing the masses during the nineteen hundreds for employment or for university studies (Crosby, 1993). To meet these changing needs, the nature of education has involved modification of instruction to effectively teach to individual differences, yet the product of mass education seemingly has yielded an inability to allow for a multitude of individual differences. This situation itself creates within the educational system an inherent weakness which gained national attention in the 1980s when the National Commission on Excellence in Education issued its report entitled A Nation at Risk. In this report at-risk students, at-risk teachers, at-risk educators, at-risk schools and others at-risk were identified. The term at-risk immediately became a "buzz" word and has remained significant jargon in the field of education. Since this 1983 report, at-risk has replaced earlier descriptors such as educationally disadvantaged or culturally deprived in discussions of students who were experiencing difficulties with learning.

Research confirms that of the numerous problems currently besetting education, problems concerning at-risk students are among the most serious and significant (Rossi & Stringfield, 1995). It is projected that by the year 2000 the number of at-risk students in schools will be substantially higher (Davis, 1993), and in the year 2020, a majority of students enrolled in schools will be

living in situations which would traditionally place them at-risk for experiencing educational problems (Rossi and Stringfield, 1995). Thus, a decade following the report on A Nation at Risk, American school children still remain at risk of failing or of dropping out of school.

Since the problem of at-risk students presents no sign of decreasing, educators continue to develop programs that exhibit a positive impact on these students at risk, and combinations of strategies for at-risk students continue to be studied (Slavin & Madden, 1989). Problems persist, however, because the term at-risk remains multifaceted. Numerous causes contribute to being classified at-risk, but the most common reason for dropping out of school continues to be poor academic performance (Hahn, 1987) .

Studies on the national, state, and local levels continue to produce a variety of programs designed to target students at risk. From the Office of Educational Research and Improvement within the U. S. Department of Education to state and local educational agencies, urgency to meet the growing crisis of at-risk students continues to generate research and case studies. One such study evolved from an urban middle Tennessee high school where the principal acknowledged that the drop-out rate in 1992 hit an all-time high of twenty-six percent; the high school experienced one of the highest drop-out rates in the state of Tennessee (tracking students from the ninth grade through graduation). Local administrators, including the high school principal and the superintendent, set a goal of reducing the drop-out rate by five percent a year, with the ultimate goal being a ten percent drop-out rate by the year 2000. Their request to classroom teachers was to identify students who were at-risk of failing in their school work and to design programs to promote a higher success rate. Departments within the school began addressing the situation. Within the English department two English

III (eleventh grade) instructors specifically identified students who were at risk of failing English and designed lessons plans so that the curriculum modifications encompassed the same work as that of students not at risk, but approached teaching and testing in a different manner.

Statement of the Problem

An in-depth study and analysis of the outcome of the students who received curriculum modifications and those who did not receive curriculum modifications at this urban middle Tennessee high school in an attempt to address the problem of their being at-risk of failing English III does not exist. As this high school, as well as high schools statewide, has been mandated by the state of Tennessee to reduce the drop-out rate to ten percent by the year 2000, it is crucial to continue to address the problem of students at-risk and to be aware of curriculum modifications that may play a significant role in promoting success with at-risk students.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to provide an analysis of the historical data of the grades of the twenty-five identified at-risk students enrolled in English III during the 1993 school year to determine if curriculum modifications had a positive effect in increasing grades/scores in English. After determining the effectiveness, modifications to existing programs or organization of new programs could be indicated, and this knowledge could prove useful to the faculty and/or English department.

Information concerning effectiveness about curriculum modifications for at-risk students could lead to improved educational experiences and a

reduction in problems for at-risk students on the local, state, and national level.

If this study is found to be meaningful and/or significant, a follow-up study to examine the merit of curriculum modifications for at-risk students might be deemed necessary since the original study was conducted five years ago.

Significance of the Study

According to the Office of Research in the Office of Educational Research and Improvement at the U. S. Department of Education, the problems of at-risk students continue to increase; "the need 'to raise the performance of at-risk youth' has become a popular rallying cry for school reform . . . " (Rossi & Montgomery, 1992) . Additionally, the Tennessee Department of Education has revealed that the current educational systems within the state are not sufficiently meeting the needs of at-risk students (1991) . Since emphasis has been placed on identifying and meeting the needs of at-risk students, it is imperative to evaluate the effectiveness of programs which are attempting to address those needs. Therefore, it is relevant to assess the historical data of the urban middle Tennessee high school where curriculum modifications were implemented for at-risk students. Study may indicate that curriculum modifications for at-risk students make a significant difference in grades (and ultimately the decision of some students to remain in school or to graduate) and should be continued at the urban middle Tennessee high school. Failure to assess past and current data will prohibit meaningful changes in the increase of at-risk student numbers.

Studying at-risk students will provide educators with knowledge which may be useful to the teachers and beneficial to the students. Although

educators often use personal experience or opinions of experts, research affords an opportunity to use a systematic approach to studying and sharing results with other educators. Idealistically, collecting and analyzing data about at-risk students who receive curriculum modifications versus at-risk students who receive no curriculum modifications will add to the broad base of research knowledge. (Gall, Gall, and Borg, 1999) .

Limitations of the Study

This study was subject to the following limitations:

1. The study was limited to the English department at the junior level at an urban middle Tennessee high school. Although this study may not be representative of all high schools nationwide, nor even all high schools in the South, the middle Tennessee high school is representative of traditional public high schools in Tennessee.

2. The study was limited to students (25 in the experimental group and 25 in the control group) enrolled in English III for two semesters during the 1993-1994 school year.

3. The sampling was non random since students were assigned to the two English III classes.

Research Questions

The following questions were posed for consideration:

1. Was there a difference in the second semester grades of at-risk English III students who received curriculum modifications and at-risk English III students who did not receive curriculum modifications?

2. Does gender play a role in at-risk English III students' grades when curriculum modifications occur? Do females or males at-risk react positively to curriculum modifications, and do their grades improve?

3. Does ethnicity play a role in at-risk English III students' grades when curriculum modifications are made? Do Blacks or Whites at risk react positively to curriculum modifications, and do their grades improve?

4. Does socioeconomic status play a role in at-risk English III students' grades when curriculum modifications are offered? Do students on free or reduced lunch/fees react positively to curriculum modifications, and do their grades improve? Is the same true for at-risk students who are not on free or reduced lunch?

5. Does attendance play a role in at-risk English III students' grades when curriculum modifications are made?

6. Does IQ play a role in at-risk English III students' grades when curriculum modifications occur?

Statement of Hypotheses

Historical data collected from at-risk English III students enrolled in an urban middle Tennessee high school was used to test the following null hypotheses:

1. There is no significant difference between the second semester grades of at-risk English III students who receive curriculum modifications and at-risk English III students who receive no curriculum modifications.

2. There is no significant difference between the second semester grades of female at-risk English III students who receive curriculum modifications and second semester grades of male at-risk English III students who receive curriculum modifications.

3. There is no significant difference between the second semester grades of Black at-risk English III students who receive curriculum modifications and second semester grades of White at-risk English III students who receive curriculum modifications.

4. There is no significant difference between the second semester grades of students who are on free or reduced lunch/fees and the second semester grades of students who are not on free or reduced lunch/fees.

5. There is no significant difference between the second semester grades of students who attend classes regularly and the second semester grades of students who miss classes.

6. There is no significant difference between the second semester grades of students who have higher IQ scores and the second semester grades of students who have lower IQ scores.

Definition of Terms

This study concentrates on at-risk English students who experience curriculum modifications in their English III program (eleventh grade). Definitions that follow are intended to facilitate an understanding of the terms which are applicable to this study:

At-risk -- Individuals in this study who are considered at risk are those who are enrolled in English III (eleventh grade) and have a first semester average of 77 (a D average) or lower. When students are considered "at risk," there is a possibility for failure. Traditionally, "at risk" includes students who exhibit poor grades which may be attributed to alcoholism, drug abuse, family neglect and abuse, low self-esteem, poverty, and inappropriate school placement and curriculum ("Programming for at-risk," 1991) . Other factors which place students in the at-risk category include absenteeism, truancy, frequent tardiness, failure in one or more grades, lack of identification with school, failure to see the relevance of education, pregnancy or having a baby, boredom with school, disruptive or rebellious behavior, language deficiencies, and an inability to work within the structure of a school environment (Telfer, Jennings, McNinch, and Mottley, 1990, p. 21) .

Curriculum -- The curriculum includes all of the areas, materials, and concepts intended to be taught at a certain grade level. Curriculum is determined by following state curriculum guides, school system curriculum guides, and departmental guides. At the urban middle Tennessee high school, the curriculum for the English department includes grammar, literature, composition, vocabulary, and outside reading.

Dropout -- "A student who leaves a school, for any reason except death, before graduation or completion of a program of studies without transferring to another school" (Shafritz, Koeppe, and Soper, 1988, p. 158) .

Merit -- A school program has merit if it has a value or worth. If a program is deemed successful by the faculty, students, or both, it should be considered for further development or implementation.

Modifications/Modified -- The school curriculum is modified when a change or alteration occurs. This deviation in the curriculum is not intended to

present different material, only to present the same material in a different manner or form. Frequently, this modification results in the student being better able to grasp the concept or the material presented. These modifications do not subtract material from the program; they frequently present more support materials to clarify a lesson.

Modify as it applies to the testing situation further means to change the frequency or the form. The testing form is not changed to make the test easier, only to make it more clear or to allow for more individual expression such as essay answers instead of short, one-word answers.

Positive Effect -- An outcome which indicates an increase in the semester grade constitutes a positive effect. For example, a student who has earned a 71 for the first semester average and a 75 for the second semester average exhibits a positive gain in the semester average. This outcome is a positive effect.

Semester -- A semester comprises half of the 185 days in the school calendar that the state department of education and the local school district deem the school year. These days normally fall between the last week of August and the first week of June.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This study was conducted to determine if curriculum modifications for at-risk students had a positive effect on grades. The historical data collected from an urban middle Tennessee high school could be examined to create an interest in furthering the study. If a positive relationship between grades and curriculum modification exists for at-risk students, knowledge of this relationship could prove beneficial to both students and the school system. Thus, the review of related literature focuses on the following: (1) the need for curriculum modification for at-risk students; (2) direct results of curriculum modifications for at-risk students; and (3) case studies that concern at-risk students.

A Need for Curriculum Modification for At-Risk Students

During the last two decades, the term at-risk has been applied to any student who exhibits a need for assistance with their educational program. This need arises from a variety of factors, and the need results in the student's progress leading to poor grades, failing grades, or dropping out of school. The review of literature points to a definite necessity for schools to examine the curriculum when working with at-risk students. Using a forty-item questionnaire, Telfer, Jennings, McNinch, and Mottley (1990) identified four areas of concern for educators who work with at-risk students. These areas included the following: (1) curriculum modification, (2) assessment modification, (3) program development, and (4) demonstration of concern. Although responses to questionnaire varied among teachers, students at risk

and students not at risk, all groups perceived curriculum modifications as effective. The teachers and students not at-risk responded slightly more positive than at-risk students about the necessity of implementing curriculum modifications. A study conducted by Westfall and Pisapia (1994) concluded similarly:

> Results of this study, taken with other research findings, suggest several general recommendations that will help translate the findings into help for at-risk students. Sharing information, planning and evaluating programs . . . are important aspects of programs for developing resilience [at-risk students who do not drop out of school] (p. 3).

A further study emphasizing the importance of modifications for at-risk, special needs students conducted by Woloszyk (1996) names curriculum modifications as "critical" to effective transition programs. Woloszyk stresses the importance of making individualized curriculum modifications. He proposes that programs be designed for the diverse and special needs of the students rather than the needs of the school district and/or staff. Agreeing with this statement, Gullatt and Lofton (1996) state, "Teachers and administrators are becoming aware of a need for change in the approach to instruction for at-risk students. Traditional methods are not meeting the needs of all students" (p. 3). They conclude their remarks by adding that "in order for programs to be effective in dealing with at-risk students, these efforts must be comprehensive and meet individual student needs" (p. 4).

Several additional studies stress the need for modification in the curriculum for at-risk students with Rogus and Wildenhaus indicating that only "a limited set of needs can be addressed through the existing curriculum," and Slavin and Madden concluding from their research that "effective strategies at the middle and senior high school levels should be

continuous progress programs in which students can proceed at their own pace" ("Programming for at-risk") . To emphasize the significance of this individualization or use of modifications in programs for at-risk students, Midkiff, Towery, and Roark (1991) agreed that accommodating students' learning styles can produce an increase in achievement.

Another study of high-risk students underscored the need for educators to address the needs of at-risk students. The Education Commission of the States concluded that it was the obligation of a school system to attempt to meet the needs of these "at-risk" students (Newman, 1988) .

Direct Results of Curriculum Modifications for At-Risk Students

Over a decade ago when at-risk gained popularity as a buzz word, the Milwaukee Public School System designed a program to serve at-risk students. On the high-school level, each principal received an additional budget allotment of $150,000 to develop and modify programs within the school to meet the needs of at-risk students. Program/curriculum modifications became one of the major categories for consideration in this attempt to serve at-risk students. A more recent example of a school district citing a need to modify curriculum to accommodate at-risk students involved the Durham Public School Communities in Schools (CIS) Academy (1997) . CIS provided a student-centered environment to encourage students performing below potential and at risk of dropping out of school to remain in school. Programs were designed/modified to promote learning and to encourage student participation. During the 1995-96 school year, a goal of 90 percent of the students remaining in school was met, 91.1 percent of the

students passed their coursework and remained in school. This goal was later increased to 98 percent during the next several years.

In Motivational English for At-Risk Students: A Language Arts Course that Works, Marge Christensen (1992) provides a lengthy description of successes gained by modifying the curriculum of at-risk students at an inner-city high school in Tucson, Arizona. Her three-year English program was designed to be responsive to the needs of at-risk students, and the curriculum modification improved student grades and student participation in school.

A study of at-risk students by a high school English teacher describes how the instructor became a "risk taker" and altered the English curriculum that was not working for at-risk students. The teacher described a reading program which built on students' small successes allowing them to succeed in English and relating how their success in English class spilled over to their other classes (Ryan and Brewer, 1990).

Another English teacher took senior at-risk students and encouraged them to study with the incentive of watching films and having time for "free reading" if their classwork was completed. These curriculum modifications were motivation enough to cause most of the students to work in English class and to pass (Shiring, 1990).

Improving self-esteem proved successful with at-risk students at Amityville High School in New York. Teachers experimented with alternative groupings, varied instructional strategies, and individualized response activities. Student achievement gains were positive along with an improved self-esteem. Both seemed meaningful in the academic success of these at-risk students (Perrin, 1990).

The Caddo P. M. Senior High School in Shreveport, Louisiana, studied at-risk students and found that with curriculum modifications most students stay in school and earn their diplomas. They further discovered that

> many dropouts or 'pushouts' from Louisiana's schools genuinely want to be educated, despite their occasional indifferences, their seeming inability to conform to guidelines, and their often explosive tempers" (Baldwin, 1991, p. 29) .

Teachers, especially teachers who attempt to assist at-risk students, do make a difference in the drop-out rate.

> Teachers' daily interaction is a powerful influence on at-risk students. Effective dropout prevention components include positive instructional environment, enhancement of self-esteem, alternative education, absence monitoring, mentoring, parent involvement, social and health services, teen parent programs, and transition strategies" (Bucci and Reitzammer, 1992, p. 65) .

In one inner-city English class, the at-risk students were allowed to participate in planning their lessons, their presentation, and their evaluation. This hands-on approach to learning seemed to provide the necessary motivation for some to stay in school and to make improved grades (Stern, 1992) . The students created their own curriculum modifications under the supervision of an instructor.

Another study that examined curriculum modifications for at-risk students included four large urban school districts--Chicago, Boston, New York, and Philadelphia. The school districts analyzed the effects of high school choice of curriculum for high-risk students. The findings conclude that traditional, inflexible programs usually operate to the detriment of students at risk (Moore and Davenport, 1989) .

Webb (1991) wrote, taught from, and later published a series of seven notebooks that she specifically designed for at-risk students. Her intent was to create lesson plans that would engage, enrich, and interest students who were at risk of failing or dropping out of school. In using research findings from the Program for Advancement of Learning originating at Curry College in Milton, Massachusetts, Webb found the project useful and beneficial to at-risk students.

Case Studies That Concern At-Risk Students

Slavin and Madden (1995) used the Success for All model, a type of instruction designed to prevent academic problems in elementary schools. By identifying and working with school students in the early grades, Slavin and Madden projected a higher success rate in academic achievement. The first application of the program began in Philadelphia's Francis Scott Key School. After working with and individualizing lessons for some students (experimental group) and not for others (control group), the Woodcock Language Proficiency Battery was administered to all students. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted on each outcome. "The effects of Success for All on the achievement of English language learners were substantially positive" (1995) .

One-to-one mentoring of at-risk students became a project between California State University in Fresno, California, and local school districts as it was explained,

> Children at risk of school failure can be helped. They can also be overlooked. Harried administrators routinely confront small crises and countless demands on their time that keep the problem of at-risk children low on their "to do" list. Parents of at-risk children are often

> very concerned, but they are handcuffed by little education themselves . . . (Meyer, 1997, p. 312) .

Due to this situation, the California State University, Fresno (CSUF) designed a program to help students who were at risk of school failure with one-to-one mentoring/one-to-one-tutoring. The "measurable results are that test scores went up--much more than we would have expected" (Meyer, 1997, p. 316) . Simple modifications for at-risk students achieved "measurable results."

At Lely High School in Naples, Florida, Testerman (1996) and several other teachers decided to approach the drop-out problem by creating a one-to-one relationship for a group of at-risk students whose grade-point averages were 1.5 or less (on a four point scale). By working with the individual students, gaining their confidence, improving their attendance, and working through individual instructional problems, the numbers of students failing and dropping out of school decreased.

A nationally-recognized kindergarten through high school program entitled SAFARI, student assistance for at-risk individuals, tangentially related to the process used in many studies as a one-to-one basis was established in working with at-risk students. SAFARI advocates feel that a number of factors need to be considered in selecting and developing appropriate instructional interventions--that it is important to determine what at-risk behaviors interfere with academic success (Cooley, 1993, p. 10) . Although the program stresses addressing the varied causes of a student being at risk, the results are often establishing curriculum modifications that work for the individual student. Agreeing with this statement, the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (1997) included the following statement in a report:

> There is a clear consensus among researchers in this field that at-risk students require instruction that is cognitively challenging, that is, instruction that requires thinking and analysis, not only rote repetitive, detail-level drills. Working with a cognitively challenging curriculum requires careful leveling of tasks, so students are stretched to reach within their zones of proximal development, where they can perform with teacher guidance ("Office of Educational Research," 1997, p. 4) .

Within the review of literature, a consensus with those who have studied and/or are working with at-risk students seems to be that at-risk students respond more positively when teachers adjust to direct needs of the learners. When curriculum modification accommodate the individual students, more learning and a higher rate of success (less student failure or dropping out of school) become apparent.

CHAPTER III

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Introduction

Primary purposes of this chapter include explaining the methods and procedures utilized in the research project which concerned at-risk students and curriculum modifications by presenting an overview of the research project from the time of its actual occurrence until the historical data were collected; defining the population involved in the research project; clarifying the procedure for the data collection; and explicating the analysis of data.

Overview of the Research Project

Although high school students drop out of school for a variety of reasons, one of the major causes of quitting school is failure in one or more subjects. Since all high school students are required to enroll in English for four years and since numerous failures occur in this mandatory subject, an urban middle Tennessee high school English teacher, Mrs. Jane Smith (a generic name), decided to identify students who showed an inclination to fail English III (eleventh grade) and to attempt to assist these students. This action evolved from a reaction to the principal's 1993 request at a faculty meeting where the staff was asked to assist with the excessively high drop-out rate at the high school.

Following the first semester of the 1993-94 school year, junior English teacher Mrs. Smith evaluated the numbers of students either failing English

III or coming close to failing (having a 78, the point average just above the 77 which is a D average). Fourteen students' grades reflected a score of 78 or below. Thus, Mrs. Smith concluded that she was teaching approximately fourteen at-risk students--students who were at risk of failing English III and were potential drop-outs. In discussing the situation with Mrs. Jan Jones (another generic name), the other teacher who taught English III students, they discovered that Mrs. Jones had eleven students who are also at risk of failing English III.

After a week's planning and collaboration with Mrs. Jones, Mrs. Smith approached the principal with an idea of forming a new English class for the remainder of the school year. The proposed class was to be composed of these twenty five at-risk students who basically possessed the ability to be placed in a regular English class, such as English III, yet they lacked the needed motivation to pass. This new class would study the required materials, yet there would be modifications in the curriculum.

After much discussion and questioning, the principal agreed that Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Jones could form the new English class and could make modifications in the curriculum attempting to motivate these at-risk students. The principal stated that a continuation of the class for next year would be contingent upon documentation of classwork completed and measurable progress by the students. The teaching approach for this class was as follows: Since the students had been pooled from two classes, those of Mrs. Jones and those of Mrs. Smith, each teacher would maintain contact with the students. Thus, during each six-week grading period, Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Jones rotated teaching the students for three weeks. Mrs. Jones provided the grammar instruction, while Mrs. Smith taught literature and composition. Vocabulary was taught weekly by both instructors. Daily, the students were

presented a 45-minute lesson followed by 10 minutes of testing. Each lesson consisted of one unit taught in class with little to no homework. Individual instruction was offered for students experiencing difficulties: This one-on-one assistance occurred preferably during study hall, a daily thirty-minute block of time. The students' progress was assessed weekly to insure early detection of any failures.

In teaching the new English III class, Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Jones shared the fifth period, grouped classes. For three weeks, Mrs. Smith taught composition and literature to the at-risk class while Mrs. Jones had the regular English III class teaching those students grammar. Then after three weeks, they switched, and Mrs. Jones instructed the at-risk class for grammar; Mrs. Smith, in turn, taught the regular class literature and composition.

In presenting the "at risk" class their first literature lesson--the contemporary novel, The Chocolate War, Mrs. Smith began with a pre-reading discussion sheet that posed 12 questions. For an entire hour, the class discussed such topics as adults who bullied teenagers, teenagers who judged others by the way they dressed, and people who wanted to be popular. This discussion hit home in many cases, and the students opened up expressing their feelings much more vividly than usual. Mrs. Smith concluded the discussion by saying all of these questions were explored, addressed, or considered in The Chocolate War. She further remarked that the book had been banned in several high schools and an alternative book was available to read if they wished. Then she requested that they purchase the book and begin reading the first section of assigned chapters. Since the book was only 187 pages, had an interesting cover, presented contemporary issues, and seemed interesting, all but one student bought the book and began reading faster than Mrs. Smith had imagined they would. Each day the discussion of

the novel was active, and each day at least 85 percent of the class passed the reading quizzes. Since the story took place at a boys' school, most of the boys felt it was their duty to explain the emotions of the boys in the novel. They frequently wanted to explain the motivation and justification behind the main characters' actions: They especially wanted to explain the savagery of the fight on the football field.

When the students wrote a comparison and contrast paper discussing two of the main characters, their papers reflected emotions, which was atypical for the class. The students had definite feelings about these characters, and they expressed them in more detail than their usual compositions. Only two out of the group did not turn in a paper.

This study proved to be a tremendous success due to the novel's subject matter--teenagers in realistic situations. Although it is currently the number one contemporary novel being read by high school students according to the National Council of English Teachers' survey, it is "racy." There are half a dozen conversations and situations that could justify questioning the acceptance of the novel in a high school setting. The students, however, read the novel (only four scored below an 80 on the final test) and asked for another one similar for the sixth six-week grading period.

Another unit studied by the at-risk group was Thorton Wilder's classic three-act play, Our Town . This was a change of pace for the class since the action occurs around the early 1900s. The students were each asked to volunteer for a part, and they read the play together. They assigned Mrs. Smith the Stage Manager's role since it was frequently one or two pages of reading at a time. No one else wanted to read a large role, but they all took some part or rotated parts. One of the boys who would not read aloud was assigned the task of keeping up with the class's place each day and reassigning

parts if a class member was absent. Daily, the class took a ten-question quiz; thus, most of the students listened to pass the quiz over each act.

An oral test was discussed in class following the completed reading. Mrs. Smith asked a question and allowed anyone to answer. Prior to the discussion, she informed the students that everyone had to contribute to the discussion to receive a grade for that day. All students participated.

The short-answer test at the end of this unit was given as an open-book, partner test. Each team had fifty minutes in which to complete the test without talking. Knowing the test was open-book, which Mrs. Smith had never allowed previously, pleased the students, and working with a partner also gave some of them confidence in pooling their knowledge or ability to remember where to look for the answer. Only one pair scored below a 78 on this unit test. The students admitted that this unit was not as interesting as The Chocolate War, but they also concluded that this was because Our Town was "old-fashioned" while The Chocolate War was contemporary.

Following each of these classics, the students worked on writing assignments. They first wrote a cause-effect composition. Mrs. Smith introduced the concept providing the students with detailed instructions. The students wrote the theme in class. Mrs. Smith then graded their first draft and asked the students to re-write the paper in class the next day. (The at-risk students do not handle writing a paper at home. From previous experience with this class, both instructors realized that the majority of the students would not complete the assignment if they were asked to do it at home.) However, when they worked on writing in class, all participated.

The second writing assignment entailed writing a commentary. This assignment was selected since they asked to present their "views on something or to write something humorous." Mrs. Smith wrote a

commentary on the Little Miss Muffett Syndrome and read it as an example. Eighteen of the twenty students wrote similar paragraphs, and twelve students volunteered to read them to the class. This was a relaxing lesson in which some of the students gained pride in having other students laugh at their commentary or tell them that their paper was entertaining. For several students this experience was their first opportunity to stand in front of the class and to present an original writing. The class enthusiastically deemed this lesson as beneficial.

Continuation of the curriculum modifications in the English III program for the next year were abandoned as the school underwent an extensive renovation project and in the following years altered the school day from the traditional six-period day to the four-block concept. During the 1998-99 school year, the historical data were collected for review. The primary purpose of this review of data was to determine the effect of curriculum modifications on at-risk students' academic achievement. The data included name, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, attendance age, I. Q. , first semester average, and second semester average.

Defining the Population

Fifty students were included in the study: twenty five at-risk English III students in the experimental (those receiving curriculum modifications) group and twenty-five at-risk English III students in the control (those receiving no curriculum modifications) group. In working with historical data (two classes of at-risk students who were assigned to English III classes), the sample was non random. "Sampling errors in non random samples cannot be estimated by mathematical procedures" (Gall, Gall, and Borg, 1999, p. 126) . Therefore, this could affect the validity--the study's findings--and the

reliability--whether the study is free from measurement error. This relatively small, non random sample may not reflect the population, so generalizability will also be affected. Still, this small non random sample coupled with the review of the literature should provide meaningful information for a research study.

Procedure for the Data Collection

In preparation to collect data, letters were written to both the high school principal and the school system superintendent requesting to use school records housed in the high school guidance department. Since historical data was being used, no questionnaires or consent forms were necessary. A research proposal form requesting permission to collect data was also submitted to the Human Subjects Committee at Tennessee State University.

Once permission was granted by the high school principal, the superintendent, and Tennessee State University, high school transcripts of both the control group (a 1994 English III class receiving no curriculum modifications) and the experimental group (a 1994 English III class receiving curriculum modifications) were accessed in the guidance department. Working from a roster for each class, records of students were examined one by one, and data were recorded. All identifiers were omitted from the researcher's copy of the records. Items recorded included the following: gender, ethnicity, social economic status, attendance, age, IQ, first semester grade, second semester grade, and group (experimental or control).

Analysis of Data

All data collected was entered into a text file and analyzed by a computer program, SPSS. Statistical analysis included examining descriptive statistics, a t test, and a stepwise regression at the .05 level of significance. Statistical analysis running a bivariate correlation was used to determine the coefficient that existed between the Control Group and the Experimental Group. Using the second semester grade for each student as the dependent variable and using gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, attendance, age, IQ, and first semester average as independent variables, the regression was completed to show possible significance of any or all independent variables on the dependent variable.

Statistical analysis using the regression at the .05 level of significance was used to test hypothesis 1 concerning the at-risk students who received curriculum modifications, to test hypothesis 2 concerning gender, to test hypothesis 3 concerning ethnicity, to test hypothesis 4 concerning socioeconomic status, to test hypothesis 5 concerning attendance, and to test hypothesis 6 concerning student IQ.

Chapter IV

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

Hypotheses

Six null hypotheses were investigated through the research. The .05 probability level of significance was used to either reject or fail to reject the null hypotheses.

1. There is no significant difference between the second semester grades of at-risk English III students who receive curriculum modifications and at-risk English III students who receive no curriculum modifications.

2. There is no significant difference between the second semester grades of female at-risk English III students who receive curriculum modifications and second semester grades of male at-risk English III students who receive curriculum modifications.

3. There is no significant difference between the second semester grades of Black at-risk English III students who receive curriculum modifications and second semester grades of White at-risk English III students who receive curriculum modifications.

4. There is no significant difference between the second semester grades of students who are on free or reduced lunch/fees and the second semester grades of students who are not on free or reduced lunch/fees.

5. There is no significant difference between the second semester grades of students who attend classes regularly and the second semester grades of students who miss classes.

6. There is no significant difference between the second semester grades of students who have higher IQ test scores and the second semester grades of students who have lower IQ test scores.

Presentation and Analysis of Data

Historical data from two English III classes were collected. Table 1 presents that data. Each class contained twenty-five (25) students for a total of 50 subjects. Of the 26 males represented in the total group, 12 were in the Experimental Group (Group A), and 14 were in the Control Group (Group B). Of the 24 females in the total group, 13 were in the Experimental Group (Group A), and 11 were in the Control Group (Group B).

Table 2

Distribution by Gender

	Total Count	Group A Count	Group B Count
Male	26	12	14
Female	24	13	11
Total	50	25	25

Of the fifty students, 36 students were White, while 14 were Black. Both groups (Group A and Group B) had 18 White and 7 Black students. This data is reflected in Table 3.

Table 3

Distribution by Ethnicity

	Total Count	Group A Count	Group B Count
White	36	18	18
Black	14	7	7
Total	50	25	25

TABLE 1

	Name	Gender	Ethnicity	SES	Attendance	Age	IQ	First Sem. Gr	Second Sem. Gr	Group Number
1	01	Male	White	Paid	156	17	103	70.0	72.0	A Group
2	02	Female	White	Paid	164	16	108	74.0	81.0	A Group
3	03	Male	White	Reduced Lunch	174	17	118	76.0	87.0	A Group
4	04	Male	Black	Paid	168	16	100	78.0	76.0	A Group
5	05	Male	White	Paid	144	17	106	78.0	86.0	A Group
6	06	Female	White	Paid	147	16	98	70.0	77.0	A Group
7	07	Female	White	Paid	155	16	95	72.0	84.0	A Group
8	08	Male	White	Paid	167	16	100	77.0	83.0	A Group
9	09	Male	White	Paid	172	16	104	72.0	79.0	A Group
10	10	Female	White	Reduced Lunch	179	16	102	71.0	82.0	A Group
11	11	Male	White	Paid	168	17	94	77.0	81.0	A Group
12	12	Female	Black	Paid	152	16	78	52.0	71.0	A Group
13	13	Female	White	Reduced Lunch	161	16	110	79.0	83.0	A Group
14	14	Female	White	Paid	179	16	92	70.0	80.0	A Group
15	15	Female	White	Free Lunch	154	16	106	72.0	77.0	A Group
16	16	Male	White	Paid	160	16	114	73.0	81.0	A Group
17	17	Male	Black	Paid	165	17	66	66.0	73.0	A Group
18	18	Female	White	Paid	168	16	87	74.0	82.0	A Group
19	19	Male	Black	Reduced Lunch	155	17	113	76.0	85.0	A Group
20	20	Female	Black	Paid	163	16	97	70.0	82.0	A Group
21	21	Female	Black	Free Lunch	166	16	97	68.0	79.0	A Group
22	22	Male	Black	Free Lunch	173	17	82	73.0	81.0	A Group
23	23	Female	White	Paid	159	16	107	78.0	90.0	A Group
24	24	Female	White	Paid	170	16	98	74.0	77.0	A Group
25	25	Male	White	Paid	164	16	102	67.0	74.0	A Group
26	26	Male	White	Paid	135	16	91	71.0	70.0	B Group
27	27	Female	White	Paid	152	16	98	78.0	80.0	B Group
28	28	Female	White	Free Lunch	175	17	101	70.0	70.0	B Group
29	29	Female	White	Paid	176	16	81	70.0	70.0	B Group
30	30	Female	White	Paid	143	16	114	78.0	79.0	B Group
31	31	Male	White	Paid	172	16	102	79.0	60.0	B Group
32	32	Female	Black	Paid	177	17	110	79.0	64.0	B Group
33	33	Male	White	Reduced Lunch	175	16	112	78.0	79.0	B Group
34	34	Male	Black	Paid	174	16	108	72.0	71.0	B Group
35	35	Male	White	Paid	175	16	96	71.0	77.0	B Group
36	36	Male	White	Paid	171	17	91	79.0	72.0	B Group
37	37	Male	Black	Paid	160	16	102	74.0	76.0	B Group
38	38	Male	Black	Paid	151	16	90	60.0	68.0	B Group
39	39	Male	White	Paid	163	16	98	70.0	72.0	B Group
40	40	Female	Black	Paid	174	16	108	81.0	79.0	B Group
41	41	Female	Black	Reduced Lunch	179	16	103	83.0	82.0	B Group
42	42	Female	White	Paid	148	16	88	76.0	74.0	B Group
43	43	Male	White	Paid	176	16	114	77.0	87.0	B Group
44	44	Male	White	Free Lunch	163	16	98	75.0	80.0	B Group
45	45	Male	White	Paid	149	16	85	78.0	83.0	B Group
46	46	Female	White	Paid	164	16	79	74.0	71.0	B Group
47	47	Male	White	Paid	171	17	101	80.0	80.0	B Group
48	48	Female	Black	Free Lunch	175	16	87	76.0	79.0	B Group
49	49	Female	White	Reduced Lunch	157	16	110	74.0	76.0	B Group
50	50	Male	White	Paid	141	17	102	60.0	65.0	B Group

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Table 1

Of the 50 students, 6 were on free lunch; 7, reduced lunch; and 37 paid all of their expenses themselves. The Experimental Group (Group A) contained 3 students on free lunch, 4 on reduced lunch, and 18 who paid all of their expenses themselves. The Control Group (Group B) had 3 students on free lunch, 3 on reduced lunch, and 19 who paid all of their own expenses. Table 4 shows this data.

Table 4

Distribution by SES

	Total Count	Group A Count	Group B Count
Free Lunch	6	3	3
Reduced Lunch	7	4	3
Paid	37	18	19
Total	50	25	25

The student IQ range was 53 with the lowest IQ being 66 and the highest being 118. Table 5 shows the distribution of IQ by groups.

Table 5
Distribution of IQ

	Total Count	Group A	Group B
66.000 - 71.200	1	1	0
71.200 - 76.400	0	0	0
76.400 - 81.600	3	1	2
81.600 - 86.800	2	1	1
86.800 - 92.000	6	1	5
92.000 - 97.200	6	5	1
97.200-102.400	14	6	8
102.400-107.600	6	5	1
107.600-112.800	7	2	5
112.800-118.00	5	3	2
Total	50	25	25

Of the 180 days of school, students attended from 135-179 days with the Experimental Group (Group A) attending 144-179 days and the Control Group (Group B) attending from 135-179 days. The mean for the Experimental Group was 163.320, and the mean for the Control Group was 163.840.

In addition to the basic descriptive statistics, a paired t-test on Stat View using a .05 probability level of significance for students in the Experimental Group (Group A) and the Control Group (Group B) is shown in Table 6. This test was run to determine if the two groups were from the same population. When the first semester scores of both groups were compared, a p-value of .1645 indicted that there was no significant difference between the Experimental Group (Group A) and the Control Group (Group B). Therefore, both groups were from the same population.

Table 6

Paired t-test

	Mean Dif	t-Value	p-value
First A, First B	2.240	1.434	.1645

A multiple regression was run on SPSS using a .05 level of confidence to determine the correlation between the dependent variable (second semester score) and the independent variables (gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, attendance, age, IQ, first semester score, and group). Table 7 represents the tests of between-subjects effects. The results indicate that the two independent variables which had significance to the second semester scores are first semester scores and group number. First semester's

significance was .019, while the group number's significance was .020. The other independent variables were not significant.

Table 7

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Dependent Variable: SECSEM

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig
Corrected Model	1763.280[a]	38	46.402	2.925	.030
Intercept	211319.901	1	211319.901	13321.025	.000
GENDER	3.913	1	3.913	.247	.629
ETHNICIT	2.489	1	2.489	.157	.700
FIRSTSEM	951.684	17	55.981	3.529	.019
GROUPNUM	118.401	1	118.401	7.464	.020
GENDER * ETHNICIT	.000	0			
GENDER * FIRSTSEM	6.881	2	3.441	.217	.808
ETHNICIT * FIRSTSEM	28.000	2	14.000	.883	.441
GENDER * ETHNICIT * FIRSTSEM	.000	0			
GENDER * GROUPNUM	32.667	1	32.667	2.059	.179
ETHNICIT * GROUPNUM	.000	0			
GENDER * ETHNICIT * GROUPNUM	.000	0			
FIRSTSEM * GROUPNUM	79.052	4	19.763	1.246	.348
GENDER * FIRSTSEM * GROUPNUM	1.500	1	1.500	.095	.764
ETHNICIT * FIRSTSEM * GROUPNUM	.000	0			
GENDER * ETHNICIT * FIRSTSEM * GROUPNUM	.000	0			
Error	174.500	11	15.864		
Total	301321.000	50			
Corrected Total	1937.780	49			

a R Squared = .910 (Adjusted R Squared = .599)

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Table 8 shows the standardized regression coefficient of the group number (Group A and Group B) as .541 and the first semester scores as .507 with the second semester scores as the dependent variable.

Table 8

Standardized Beta Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	69.160	2.551		27.106	<.0004.000
	GROUPNUM	5.480	1.614	.440	3.396	.001
2	(Constant)	26.184	9.690		2.702	.010
	GROUPNUM	6.734	1.387	.541	4.857	<.0004
	FIRSTSEM	.560	.123	.507	4.548	<.0004

a. Dependent Variable: SECSEM

Based on Table 8, the predicted second semester scores of each individual student equals .541 times how many standard deviations above or below the mean of that variable [Group Number] plus .507 times how many standard deviations above or below the mean of that variable [First Semester Score] plus the error.

The Beta coefficient of .507 indicates prior learning influenced the second semester score in that students tended to make the same type of score relative to the group each semester. Those who scored low in the group for the first semester were low the second semester; those with high scores the first semester remained high the second semester.

Analysis by group assignment with a Beta coefficient of .541 indicates group placement had more of an effect on their final score than prior

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learning. The treatment had relatively the same effect on individual scores in that those that scored low remained low in the group, and those that scored high remained high in the group.

An additional table, Table 9, presents the R Square (coefficient of determination) and the Adjusted R Square for the regression model. Model 1, representing the Group Number, has an R Square of .194 and an Adjusted R Square of .177, indicating that 18% of the dependent variable's (second semester score) variation is explained by the independent variable, Group Number; whereas, Model 2, representing Group Number and the First Semester Score, has an R Square of .440 and an Adjusted R Square of .416. The Adjusted R Square of .416 indicates that 42% of the second semester scores's variation is explained by the Group Number and the First Semester Score. Since both groups were from the same population and had basically the same mean scores the first semester, 24% of the change is accounted for by prior learning.

Table 9

Model Summary

Model Summary[c]

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.440[a]	.194	.177	5.71
2	.663[b]	.440	.416	4.80

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Chapter V

SUMMARY, FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The purpose of this study was to provide an analysis of the historical data of the grades of the twenty-five identified at-risk students enrolled in English III during the 1993 school year to determine if curriculum modifications had a positive effect in increasing their grade in English. Fifty students were included in the study: twenty five at-risk English III students in the experimental (those receiving curriculum modifications) group and twenty-five at-risk English III students in the control (those receiving no curriculum modifications) group. In working with historical data (two classes of at-risk students who were assigned to English III classes), the sample was non random.

The data collected were analyzed by the statistical software program SPSS. StatView for Windows was used for the paired t-test.

Findings and Conclusions

The data were analyzed statistically using a paired t-test and a multiple regression. The findings of this study are summarized as follows:

Several null hypotheses were investigated through the research. The .05 probability level of significance was used to either reject or to retain (fail to reject) the null hypotheses.

1. Null hypothesis number one stated that there is no significant difference between the second semester grades of at-risk English III students who receive curriculum modifications and at-risk English III students who

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receive no curriculum modifications. Table 7 shows .020 significance at the .05 level of confidence between the group number and the second semester grade which does indicate a significant difference. Thus, this null hypothesis is rejected.

2. Null hypothesis number two stated that there is no significant difference between the second semester grades of female at-risk English III students who receive curriculum modifications and second semester grades of male at-risk English III students who receive curriculum modifications. Table 7 shows .629 significance at the .05 level of confidence between the second semester grades of female at-risk English III students who receive curriculum modifications and second semester grades of male at-risk English III students who receive curriculum modifications indicating there is no significance. Therefore, this null hypothesis is retained.

3. Null hypothesis number three stated that there is no significant difference between the second semester grades of Black at-risk English III students who receive curriculum modifications and second semester grades of White at-risk English III students who receive curriculum modifications. Table 7 shows .700 significance at the .05 level of confidence between the second semester grades of Black at-risk English III students who receive curriculum modifications and second semester grades of White at-risk English III students who receive curriculum modifications. Thus, this null hypothesis is retained because there is no significance.

Statistical data revealed that curriculum modifications for at-risk students enrolled in English III are significant in increasing a student's grade. Gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, attendance, age, IQ, and first semester scores do not significantly impact scores.

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After determining the effectiveness of curriculum modifications, alterations to existing programs or organization of new programs could be indicated, and this knowledge could prove useful to the faculty and/or English department at the urban middle Tennessee high school. Information concerning effectiveness about curriculum modifications for at-risk students could lead to improved educational experiences and a reduction in problems for at-risk students on the local, state, and national level.

Recommendations

As a result of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. At-risk English III students should be identified the first semester of each school year.

2. Curriculum modifications should be made for at-risk English III students.

3. Follow-up research should be completed on at-risk English III students who receive curriculum modification.

4. Future research should study at-risk English students enrolled in English I, English II, English III, and English IV at the high school level to determine if curriculum modifications significantly affect students' scores.

5. Teachers should continue to educate themselves about current research concerning at-risk students.

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